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CARIBBEAN MILITARY ENCOUNTERS

EDITED BY SHALINI PURI
& LARA PUTNAM

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Series Editors
Kofi Campbell
Department of English
Wilfrid Laurier University
Waterloo, Ontario
Canada

Shalini Puri
Department of English
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
USA

Shalini Puri • Lara Putnam
Editors

Caribbean Military Encounters



Editors
Shalini Puri
Department of English
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Lara Putnam
Department of History
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

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The Anguilla Revolution and Operation Sheepskin

Don E. Walicek

Origins

Anguilla's struggle for self-determination and independence has diffuse and complex origins. Some trace its beginnings to six o'clock meetings in which people talked under the shade of a flowering tree known for its poisonous fruit. Others recall that a young man named Ronald Webster went door-to-door selling goods and vegetables and, to borrow a phrase from some of his customers, "got people to imagine a future of freedom." A frequently repeated narrative suggests that the movement took shape when locals attacked and ended a pageant in which aspiring beauty queens put on controversial one-piece swimsuits in the name of the Associated State of St. Kitts, Nevis, and Anguilla.[1] At the same time, most local commentators reject the idea that Anguilla's revolution *began* at all, describing it instead as the "flaring up" of a long-held, stubborn spirit of resistance.[2] They assert that this spirit, born out of circumstances of hardship, endurance, and hope, is inseparable from their existence as a people.

This chapter links the story of the Anguilla Revolution to Operation Sheepskin, the military invasion that resulted in the occupation of the island by British paratroopers and Royal Engineers. It does so by interweaving

D.E. Walicek (✉)
Department of English and the Graduate Program in Linguistics,
University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus, San Juan, Puerto Rico
e-mail: don.walicek@upr.edu

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excerpts from oral testimonies collected from former rebels, both common citizens and leaders, with archival information and related scholarship. Many Anguillians today see the rebellion as an affirmative turning point that delivered them political change and acceptable living conditions. Operation Sheepskin, the event that by almost all accounts ended the movement, is associated with violence, uncertainty, and assault on local dignity. Nevertheless, memories of the invasion seldom disrupt narratives asserting the rebel movement's success as a "real revolution." Instead, the occupation is frequently conceptualized as a threshold leading to development, increased economic prosperity, and changes in local ways of life.

The bold vision of change that gripped Anguilla centered on the refusal to be part of the Associated State of St. Kitts, Nevis, and Anguilla. As pointed out by Spencer Mawby, British policymakers imposed associated statehood in 1967 in order to achieve "greater constitutional influence and hence a greater measure of assurance than the normal procedure of offering internal self-government as a prelude to independence."[3] But as local historians Colville Petty and A. Nat Hodge observe, in Anguilla, "Statehood meant a strengthening of St. Kitts's domination and stranglehold over their island and the resurgence of Anguillian nationalism."[4]

Seventy miles from Anguilla, the more populous and prosperous British colony of St. Kitts had administered the smaller and relatively isolated island of Anguilla for more than a century. Slavery, sugar, and extremely fertile soil had made St. Kitts one of the most profitable outposts of the Empire. In contrast, Anguilla's topography consisted of limestone, coral, and infertile soil, and its fledgling economy provided few opportunities for wage labor on the island. The hardships of daily life in the most northerly of the Leeward Islands were compounded by cyclical drought and even famine. These conditions led members of the population to migrate for work and to repeatedly appeal for another form of political administration.

Ridden with serious tensions, relations between the two islands led the majority of Anguilla's population to oppose any form of union with St. Kitts by 1967, including policies that the British presented as decolonization. According to an anecdote Anguillians frequently recall today, tempers flared a few years earlier when the central government seized funds allocated for a much-needed "Anguilla Pier" and built it on St. Kitts instead![5] In addition, residents resented that as much as two-thirds of the population, an estimated 4,000 people, worked in the Virgin Islands, the Dominican Republic, St. Martin, St. Kitts, as well as in the US and Britain.[6] Locals, especially the elderly, depended on remittances from abroad, and many

considered their island's lack of development to be the result of neglect. As they would point out, Anguilla lacked a commercial port as well as paved streets, electricity, telephones, and adequate healthcare facilities.[7]

Proud demands for the establishment of direct colonial relations with the British Crown framed Anguilla's adamant refusal to accept statehood. These appeals included calls for direct communication with London; a more just approach to political representation; and, crucially, the construction of roads, an electric system, and healthcare and education facilities. These calls further unified a relatively egalitarian population that consisted largely of seamen, farmers, fishermen, and migrant agricultural workers, many of whom were small landowners. From their perspectives, the problems they faced were best addressed within the parameters of British colonialism and would only be exacerbated by membership in the tri-island state.

Envisioning Decolonization

A two-tiered vision of decolonization suggests that, even at the highest levels of government, Britain did not consistently honor what were arguably the most basic principles elaborated in the 1967 bill that formalized statehood. These were to guarantee colonized peoples "the fullest political liberty, their fullest voice in their own affairs, that their circumstances can allow."[8] Ironically, British lawmakers, even some of those who advocated for what they termed the "end of Empire," saw themselves as the main decision-makers in the process of decolonization. They deemed colonies that by their standards were poor and underdeveloped "not ready" for the epistemological shifts purportedly central to a more democratic form of governance. Thus, the Minister of State for Commonwealth Affairs stated in parliamentary debate in 1967:

> The problem which lies ahead of us in deciding the future of some of the scattered territories—many sparse in natural resources, many needing so much by way of development and education in order to give them real hope for the future—presents us with problems so great that the normal traditional concepts which apply to considerations of colonialism and anti-colonialism seem to be of considerably less relevance.[9]

For this member of parliament, "the traditional concepts" applied to more established colonies with a formally educated elite, a history of direct relations

with the metropole, and access to exploitable natural resources that could contribute to the international capitalist economy (for example, St. Kitts, Dominica, Antigua, and Grenada). Small-colony exceptionalism was meant to ensure that no satellite colony became an example that encouraged others to break away. The people of 35-square-mile Anguilla recognized these contradictions and rejected the notion that the transition to associated statehood was voluntary and free, but Britain considered it a "colonial responsibility."[10]

Revolutionary Leadership

Anguilla's ability to carry out what some locals perceive to be one of only two successful modern Caribbean revolutions has much to do with the vision of its main leader, James Ronald Webster, and his success in motivating men and women of all ages and backgrounds to support the movement.[11] At the age of ten, Webster migrated to the neighboring English-speaking Dutch colony of St. Maarten to work and send money home. At Mary Fancy's Estate in Cul-de-Sac, he looked after livestock and delivered fresh milk by donkey. More than two decades later he inherited the property, then valued at approximately US$1.5 million.[12] In 1964, Webster returned home eager to begin the modernization of Anguilla's infrastructure. However, Kittian authorities blocked his efforts to build roads and extend electrical service even when he offered to finance the initiatives himself.[13]

Two other principal actors in the Revolution were also politicized abroad. The first, Atlin Harrigan, emigrated to the UK in 1960 and trained as an electrician. Harrigan established Anguilla's first newspaper, the *Beacon*, in September 1967 as a response to "the stand Anguilla made for freedom and democracy."[14] In the beginning, it functioned as the movement's mouthpiece, but its critique of Webster's decisions eventually exacerbated fractions and controversies that emerged during the struggle. Harrigan also established an association that provided support from St. Thomas, one of the US Virgin Islands. It supplied rebels with food, household products, and donations when St. Kitts cut off their supply lines. A third leader among an inner circle of men and women who propelled the movement was John "Bob" Rogers. From a young age he "questioned why life was so hard, difficult, and poor."[15] Rogers emigrated to England in 1956 and then began to understand the British parliamentary system and its impact on life in the Caribbean:

> When the British created the West Indian Federation I began to learn and every time I read the paper, in my mind I spinned it back to the Anguilla's

> position in the system. An employee in a car factory, I read about the Cuban Revolution and became convinced that Anguilla had inherited political injustice.[16]

After ten years in England, he returned eager to "do something." In his words, "I looked for Ronald Webster and Atlin Harrigan and we formed the movement to break off from St. Kitts, but it was [eventually] a people's movement with widespread participation."[17]

Reactions to Statehood

The imposition of associated statehood on February 27, 1967, a result of the failure of the West Indies Federation, was met with demonstrations. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office had planned celebrations, but none of its officials had foreseen Anguilla's protests. The largest of these was a mock funeral in which hundreds of mourners dressed in black and white gathered behind a station wagon carrying a black-draped coffin bearing the proclamation "Statehood is Dead." The procession consisted of most of the vehicles on the island (slightly more than 80 cars and trucks). The number of people following behind on foot grew as the motorcade made its way through the central part of the island.

An effective means of responding to decades of humiliation, the performance was reminiscent of rites of interment in which the formerly enslaved celebrated the end of slavery "once and for all" throughout the British Caribbean.[18] As numerous people who marched that day recall, some mourners were moved to tears as they sang out dramatically, "We shall overcome!" and "Oh how we wish we had a new government!" The funeral ended with a burial and prayer in Burrow's Park as the people sang anthems and offered statehood a final farewell. Colville Petty and Nat Hodge remark that the symbolism of the mock funeral was powerful because, in the eyes of the Anguillian people, "Statehood was dead and buried, with no hope of resurrection."[19]

The London *Times* suggested that the protests were not peaceful but "hostile demonstrations."[20] Following the protests, British officials neither pursued dialogue nor made adjustments to established protocols. In fact, the local warden insisted on raising the new flag in front of his residence, even after men whom he called "rioters" prevented his first

attempt to do so.[21] He did this at the crack of dawn, dressed in his pajamas and with police protection.

Shortly thereafter, the warden's house, one of the largest and most symbolic of the island's few early colonial–era buildings, was destroyed by fire. According to Rogers, the initial plan was to destroy only the flag:

> We came to the decision that for us to destroy the flag, we had to destroy the building, because the flag was in close proximity to the wooden building. I had read about Fidel Castro. It was either to make that move or continue along with Bradshaw. Luckily, he did not yet have a military army big enough to overpower us, and we had a few guns.[22]

"Bradshaw" was Robert Llewellyn Bradshaw, a former machinist who had become Premier of the Associated State of St. Kitts, Nevis, and Anguilla, and probably the person in the world most troubled by the protests. He had closely followed various acts of intimidation and violence directed at those sympathetic to statehood. In the early stages of the conflict, he publicly rejected the idea that a substantial number of people had successfully organized a movement around issues of development and political domination, insisting it was just "some wild Irish and mulatto people from the East End causing trouble."[23] Men and women of mixed racial ancestry, including prominent citizens of Island Harbour, were indeed active in the movement early on, but their frustration was shared across distant villages, and their actions generated broad support.

Bradshaw demanded British assistance to quickly "restore law and order" in Anguilla, insistent that it was a prerequisite for securing its long-term union with St. Kitts and Nevis.[24] His implementation of policies that protected manual laborers, in particular sugarcane workers, garnered him local and international support. But given prior tensions and the lack of any assurance that the new state was committed to making their community economically viable, he swayed neither the cane workers from Anguilla who labored in St. Kitts nor the general population of Anguilla.[25]

As Spencer Mawby observes, Bradshaw's requests for British military intervention were supported by other colonies, including Antigua and Grenada, and by some conservative politicians in Whitehall, but matters related to the conflict were not yet seen as pertinent to Britain's national interest.[26] Some rebels responded to Britain's tabling of Bradshaw's requests, which was interpreted as de facto support for their cause, with public displays of British patriotism and expressions of respect for the monarch.

The First Declaration: Separation

On May 30, 1967, the people of Anguilla declared themselves independent of the State Government and replaced the statehood flag with the Union Jack. They forced the Kittian constabulary to leave and then seized the police armory, calling for either the reintroduction of direct British rule or associated statehood for Anguilla alone. Quickly dismissing assertions that their demands were unconstitutional, they believed that, if they raised their voices in protest, then colonial administrators would consider their preferences regarding their political future.

Hundreds of people played roles in the movement. Among them was Clevette Rogers, who repeatedly went to The Valley to fire shots in the roof of the police station, an attempt to convince them to leave on their own. After the police, all of whom were Kittian, were forced off the island, he took a torch to the locker in the Customs Office, removed the money, 3,000 Eastern Caribbean dollars, and then turned it over to leaders so that it could be used to pay the salaries of the few dozen people who worked as civil servants.[27]

Approximately six weeks after the May declaration, leaders of the movement organized a local referendum concerning status. Ballots featured the symbol of a hat for independence and a shoe for those opposing secession. The hatters won in a landslide, with 1,815 voting for "independence" from St. Kitts, and 5 for a return to the fold.[28] Believing that the referendum could provoke allegations of coercion or even military action, leaders arranged for numerous reporters to observe and write about the process. The journalists telegraphed the results to various countries and the UN.[29]

Following the referendum, the rebels became more vocal about the struggle's base in Christian principles, one that was determined to avoid bloodshed as well as the erasure of its gains. This shift followed a controversial attack on St. Kitts organized by Webster, Atlin Harrigan, and a group of heavily armed locals. The party's main goal was to overthrow the government and then install one sympathetic to Anguilla's predicament. They planned to join forces with Kittian opposition and then kill the members of the Defense Force, attack the power station, destroy the fuel depot, and kidnap Robert Bradshaw. The general sentiment in Anguilla was that, if the coup-d'état had unfolded as planned, then it would have probably resulted in a large number of deaths, dissipated empathy for the cause, and provoked retaliation and legal actions that

would have crushed the emerging rebellion. Fortunately for the rebels, the attack was ridden by a series of blunders, and it prompted the articulation of a clear ideological and moral center around which the movement could continue to grow.

In response to Anguilla's separatist declaration and the events surrounding it, Robert Bradshaw announced a state of emergency of seven months in which his government would make every effort to take Anguilla back. One method was by holding in Basseterre the monthly pension payments and remittances destined for Anguilla, many of which came from members of the Anguillian communities in Slough, England, and Perth Amboy, New Jersey. Eventually, Postmaster G. K. Harrington and his clerks addressed the problem by taking a fishing boat to St. Martin twice a week to post outgoing correspondence and pick up mail that had been sent to post office boxes rented by the movement's leaders.[30]

In September 1967, Bradshaw traveled to London, where he warned diplomats that "a group of gunmen financed by dirty money" provided by American interests controlled Anguilla.[31] Bradshaw argued that division of the state would create problems and difficulties for the people of the region, including future generations, and reiterated his belief that associated statehood would rescue some of the hopes and achievements that the breakup of the Federation of the West Indies had scattered "to the depth of the Caribbean Sea."[32]

Anguilla's "first declaration of independence" brought with it significant political changes. Initially, the breakaway island was led by "President" Peter Adams, who had served as Anguilla's single representative in the House of Assembly in Basseterre, but in August 1967, the more militant Ronald Webster replaced him.[33] Upon appointment, Webster closed the airport and established beach patrols in order to maintain stability and prevent any invasion by St. Kitts.[34] To prevent the arrival of reinforcement by air, locals rolled oilcans onto the dirt landing strip, positioning them between branches and sticks carried over by boys from the nearby villages of George Hill and The Forest.[35]

In addition, Webster and others who supported Anguilla's right to secession went public with a renewed vision of rebellion that included some anti-colonial elements. For example, Webster cautioned that the building of even one huge Hilton-like hotel would convert the island into "a nation of bus boys, waiters, and servants."[36] He also critiqued the example of St. Thomas, where locals had become "second class citizens and had to run from their own country," and suggested that a maximum of

30 tourists should visit Anguilla at a time.[37] A devout Seventh-Day Adventist who neither drank nor smoked, Webster rejected a million-dollar deal proposed by magnate Aristotle Onassis because it included the construction of a casino and would have allowed him to sail his yacht under the Anguilla flag.[38] Webster dedicated much time to communicating the rationale behind his decisions to an international group of journalists—including reporters from the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Guardian*—repeatedly mentioning the building up of a defense force for protection from invaders.

Another face of the movement was Jeremiah Gumbs, Anguilla's emissary to the UN. An Anguillian who had served in the US Army, he was charged to ensure that Anguilla would assume "its rightful place among the nations of the earth."[39] Testifying before the Special Committee on Colonialism in 1967, Gumbs assured delegates that Anguillians were united and that there was "no violence either of word or deed." He upheld the idea that they had "full equality with the citizens of any other islands with which they are associated" and denied that they aimed for "total independence."[40]

Combating accusations that his people were vulnerable and unprepared for their future, Gumbs explained that more than 300 years of colonial neglect had been ample time to envision a free Anguilla. He offered a sketch of an alternative, perhaps dangerous, approach to development that raised eyebrows in the Caribbean and internationally. Echoing local sentiments alongside assertions made by Webster and advisors Roger Fisher and Leopold Kohr (from Harvard University and the University of Puerto Rico, respectively), and a group of San Francisco businessmen, he spoke of "financial assistance pouring in from all over the world," including private corporations that wanted to register as entities in his tax-free homeland. Gumb insisted that locals would maintain control over their most precious possession, land, in line with their desire "to keep the island they way God made it."[41]

In December 1967, the British government sent a Parliamentary Mission to Anguilla and St. Kitts. The visit was prompted by discussions about the Anguilla crisis in Britain and dozens of newspaper articles about Anguilla's unique rebellion, many of which presented British political leadership in a negative light. The talks produced numerous advances. Both islands agreed to refrain from hostile action during a period of up to 12 months, during which they would work together "to make efforts in good faith to restore friendship and harmony."[42] Second,

a senior civil servant named Anthony ("Tony") Lee was appointed to administer Anguilla until December 1968. Third, Anguilla finally began to receive direct development aid, at least for those projects approved by Bradshaw's office.

On the morning of May 29, 1968, as people prepared for the celebration of the first-year anniversary of separation from the associated state, scores of people gathered around one of Anguilla's most beloved citizens, Brother Judge Gumbs the Prophet, as he played his large kettledrum at a shady spot in The Valley, the center of local government. God had spoken to "Judge" and given him a vision of the future. He reported a "heat in the air" that would bring military invasion and attempts on the lives of rebel leaders.[43] His predictions were taken seriously given that, since his return home from the sugarcane fields of Cuba in the 1920s, Gumbs had cured people of diseases and warned villagers of upcoming accidents, hurricanes, droughts, and disasters at sea.[44]

President Ronald Webster trusted Judge Gumbs. As Webster had explained to his followers and foes alike, he attributed both his political activism and his willingness to give his life for the cause to a distinct voice and divine call that forced him to confront an "uncertain future."[45] For his supporters, an invasion could not be prevented but was something for which they had to prepare. Issuing an order for increased vigilance, Webster ordered extra men to join the loyal security volunteers, who had for months protected Anguilla's beaches. Some were armed with guns smuggled in from Puerto Rico, others with bats and rifles. Several built fires to signal their positions and discourage the landings of unknown ships.

On the first anniversary of Anguilla's separation the next day, the St. Kitts House of Assembly passed a resolution insisting that Anguilla begin planning for its reincorporation into the state. A defiant Webster appeared on a platform at the park flanked by the Anglican Canon Guy Carleton, a British citizen who had worked as a missionary in Central Africa. Webster reminded those in attendance that their list of demands was short: permanent and complete separation from St. Kitts, control of internal affairs, and direct colonial rule by Britain. In response to Bradshaw's resolution, Carleton preached about Moses leading the Israelites into the wilderness. As Carlton spoke, he identified Anguilla's Moses as the man surrounded by members of the Anguilla Defense Force.[46] Prepared to uphold the oath they had taken to protect the Revolution's leaders, its 15 members flanked Webster, armed and dressed in dark green boilersuits.[47]

The Balance Sheet

During the second half of 1968, Bradshaw assembled a police force of 110 and a special defense militia of another 70 members, insistent that it was essential for his government to have arms superior to those of the Anguilla rebels.[48] He warned of numerous threats, including a possible invasion from Puerto Rico and "gangster types" that would embarrass both the British and the Americans.[49] In response, Her Majesty's government supplied him with rifles, machine carbines, tear gas, and other weapons. The Interim Agreement endorsed by both Anguilla and St. Kitts was clearly failing.

A special conference was convened in London to ease increased tensions. Because of secession, locals had to travel 70 miles by boat to make savings withdrawals. Pensions, gratuities, and mail had again been withheld.[50] Bradshaw rejected proposals that would allow the people of Anguilla to register deeds and other legal documents. The leader of St. Kitts reportedly stated, "I must get Anguilla back on their knees," and Webster responded, "that is just impossible."[51] The talks failed, but international press coverage suggested that Anguilla had acted responsibly.

Proud of their accomplishments over a period of 17 months, Webster and other leaders drew up a balance sheet. From Webster's vantage point, which was increasingly controversial locally, various factors pushed the odds in their favor and encouraged a firmer stance against Britain. He believed, for example, that the North American and British presses were on their side and ready to rally in their defense. In addition, evidence suggested that the UN and the larger and influential Caribbean Commonwealth countries had become more sympathetic to their cause, even while Britain pressured them for public support. Finally, they argued that the US desired a solution to the crisis.[52]

As the interim period that expired at the end of 1968 drew to a close, Anguilla began to act more like a self-governing nation and to embark on projects that would generate considerable revenue. In addition to electing a seven-member Island Council in violation of a prior agreement, Webster announced the printing of special postage stamps that would "reaffirm the island's independence." The stamps, which would be gobbled up at high prices by collectors all over the world, would bear the phrase, "Independence, January, 1969."[53] Plans to divide and sell government-owned lands at Corito Bay on the island's southern shore were also put in motion.[54]

The British Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Mr. William Whitlock, warned Webster not to take any "precipitate step such as a further illegal declaration of independence."[55] The emergency escalated with the departure of British Commissioner Anthony Lee at the end of 1968, Britain's termination of all aid, and additional sanctions from St. Kitts. Shortly thereafter, Whitlock merely repeatedly earlier statements, announcing that "the most satisfying arrangement would be one in which the Anguillans would obtain as much autonomy as practical while remaining part of the Associated State."[56]

The Second Declaration: The Republic of Anguilla

On February 6, 1969, the people of Anguilla organized a referendum on whether to break all ties with Britain and become an independent republic with an American-style constitution. Anguillians living in the US Virgin Islands participated in the vote. A total of 1,739 voted for the break and only 4 against it. The Constitution, which included a Bill of Rights, established that the country would be led by a president, a vice-president, and an 11-person unicameral legislature. In addition, it asserted the right to declare war and establish a navy and other armed forces.[57]

A "Statement of Policy" issued on the republic's letterhead explains that it was "with great reluctance, after careful consideration, not inconsistent with the Laws of God and Human Dignity" that the unilateral declaration of independence was issued. The document goes on, "our course is set and the resolve to be the master of our own destiny cannot be altered by those who would diminish or deter our freedom for the sake of convenience or pride of possession." Signed by Webster, it ends with a plea for Her Majesty to "demonstrate to the world her compassion for the cause of mankind."[58]

William Whitlock visited Anguilla on March 11, 1969, in an attempt to engage the leaders of the unrecognized republic. In particular, he planned to reinforce Britain's view that it maintained sovereignty over the island according to the West Indies Act of 1967. British proposals reminded Anguillians that they were obligated to pay taxes and accept a commissioner and magistrate suggested by the British Crown if development were to take place. In addition, Whitlock was to offer conditional immunity to those who had broken the law through political activism. But a few hours after his arrival, he and those in his party were physically threatened and violently forced back into their plane.

The story about what went wrong that day has several variations, but all make two things clear: first, the proud locals who received Whitlock at the airport believed that he and other British officials treated them rudely and condescendingly; second, interactions between Anguillians and the British sparked the sequence of actions that led to subsequent military invasion. The controversy centers on the distribution of leaflets (which included excerpts from the proposals) into the crowd that had greeted the visitors with song and smiles. According to the *Anguilla Observer*, "Whitlock literally threw his pamphlets at the crowd as a farmer might throw corn to a fowl."[59] Whitlock later suggested that the leaflets "came down like great snowflakes," and his legal advisor claimed that it was done as if he was passing out sweets to eager children at a party.[60] Further aggravating matters, Whitlock chose not to attend a lunch that Webster and other members of the Provisional Government had planned for discussion of the young nation's future.

The British Invasion

On March 19, 1969, 330 paratroopers and marines invaded Anguilla, led by an advance party of the elite Red Devils.[61] Two huge Royal Navy frigates, the *HMS Minerva* and the *HMS Rothesay*, moved in two hours before first light, having departed from Antigua the previous day. At 5:30 a.m., the first troops made landfall at Crocus Bay and Road Bay.[62] They had been warned of popular unrest and instability by their commanding officers. But shortly after reaching shore, they were met by a large group of international journalists and the flashes of cameras rather than the hooligans and native "wild men" mentioned in official colonial documents.[63]

The previous day, Webster had received word that "the British were coming" from allies in Antigua, and he did what he could to "prepare the people and avoid bloodshed."[64] Leaders had abandoned their defiant posture in agreement that foolish violence was of no use. Local lookouts sounded warnings by blowing conch shells, the same instrument their enslaved ancestors had used to defeat French forces in a long-forgotten 1745 invasion.

The troops established control quickly. The initial party proceeded from Crocus Bay to the island's center. As they moved southeast, paratroopers landed near The Valley Secondary School, the space where they would set up a temporary logistics center. One of the squadrons' first tasks was preparation for the Royal Navy helicopter "heavy drops" that delivered supplies and other materials, among them four Land Rovers that landed

near one of the island's most well-known landmarks, the mahogany tree. A mortar platoon was stationed at the airport, a magnet for social interaction since the revolt began. Once they had grouped, the forces "dug in, mounted machine guns, established control points along the roads, stopped, searched, and questioned everyone."[65]

Carmen Woods, an Anguillian who had worked as a police officer in St. Kitts but who returned home to join Webster's peace-keeping force, recalls that the soldiers initially refused to speak to her and other local police. She remembers that they used barbed wire to establish a border around certain areas and then eventually "called in the members of the force one by one to fire us." After she turned in her gun, the men who had taken charge of the island offered her tea and then asked for her help in arresting Mr. Webster. Bold and clear about her political beliefs, Woods proved unwilling to cooperate and suggested that the invasion was unjustifiable; in response, they threatened to arrest her for not cooperating and called her "cheeky," apparently surprised by her loyalty to the cause.[66]

Around 8:00 a.m. the 43-year-old Webster drove his Peugeot to The Valley. Troops stopped him on the way and instructed him to turn himself in at the secondary school. When he arrived, about 300 supporters who heckled British troops with hoots and jeers lifted him in the air as he held up a Bible.[67] The crowd sang the Anguilla freedom song to the tune of "Battle Hymn of the Republic." Many locals who gathered had been awoken by a sound never before heard in Anguilla, the tack-tack-tack of military helicopters. Several women held up small Anguillan flags that they had bought in a fundraising project while the Union Jack blew above them in the light breeze. As reported in international press coverage of the invasion, one woman carried a sign reading "God first, Webster after."[68]

Webster entered the command headquarters willingly and answered numerous questions in a straightforward manner. His interrogators, who included Tony Lee, wanted the names of the people whom British intelligence had identified as "hooligans," the purportedly trigger-happy people that threatened stability, and they demanded the surrender of the arms in the rebels' possession.[69] A crowd formed outside the building where Webster was held, and the people chanted in unison, "Let him go!" Upon his release, the president-elect of the Republic of Anguilla dedicated time to conversations with reporters in which he assured them that his people were "fighting a bloodless battle for freedom" in which violence would not solve their problems.[70]

Webster neither provided the British any names (there was no one he considered a hooligan on island except for perhaps some invading soldiers) nor turned over the requested guns (he had exaggerated the power of his armory, and then the press inflated his claims). In Webster's words, "All that I could explain to those who cross-questioned me was that I was carrying out the wishes of my people. I had a duty to protect my country and its people."[71] He refused to hold any formal negotiations until troops were removed. The same afternoon, Webster's seemingly fearless supporters put him in a sack and then loaded him on a fishing boat so he could be smuggled to St. Martin. From there he would travel to New York to protest the invasion in front of the UN.

Locals were shocked by the British show of force, and within a few hours crowds of 100 or so gathered around the administrative office where Tony Lee was to resume his work. The flag of the new republic had already been removed from the building as specified in the Red Devils's tactical plan. Protesters clustered around the colonial representatives, yelling and gesturing dramatically. Handwritten signs featured the messages "Go Home Tony Lee," "We Don't Want You," "You Must Go," and "Freedom Is Our Aim."[72] As frustration grew physical, locals tore the shirts of a few British officers and levied accusations that "Britain attacked its own, like a parent attacking its child."[73] The conflict that had initiated the rebel movement, Anguilla's political relationship with St. Kitts, had finally been recast in terms of conflict with Britain.

The paratroopers interacted with numerous civilians as the day unfolded, frequently offending local pride. Minor scuffles and heated exchanges signaled that the population resented being treated as the enemy. Testimony from Olive Rogers, a woman who left her children at home to go to The Valley and defend the island, shows that locals were angry:

> We hear that the paratroopers were comin to raid Anguilla we step up, and some of us said we goin to the airport. We went down in a pick up, [. . .] and the paratroopers they were all on top Albert Lake's shop. I see them and shout, "You come to raid we, but we come to raid all you." And we took rocks and we started letting go of the rocks at the paratroopers by the old courthouse [. . .]. They look more afraid of we than we afraid of them![74]

The soldiers they hit with rocks responded with tear gas. As she recalled, "It was let go and then a friend I was with [Doreen Duncan] was cut on her arm by a canister and someone came out of a bathroom and put a wet napkin over my face."[75]

Rogers and fellow protesters criticized Tony Lee for returning alongside troops and his public support of Operation Sheepskin. They were further angered because his arrival coincided with his appointment as commissioner for the island. Emotions flared when Lee told protesters, "Her Majesty's government planned to occupy the island for years—with an 's' at the end of it."[76] One of his first actions was refusing to recognize or negotiate with Webster, whom he denounced as an illegitimate representative of the people. Later that day, in the midst of a minor physical altercation with him, Rogers reached in the back of Lee's green Volkswagen and snatched his boots. She summed up her actions that day: "We fight for we country! We fight for it!"[77] Rogers's impassioned act of petty theft foreshadowed the public's aggressive rejection of the most important representative of the British Crown on the island. In a subsequent mock funeral in Lee's honor, those disgusted with Lee mourned the trust and authority they had once placed in him. The event was among the factors that ultimately led authorities to transfer him out. Yet memories of Lee remained vibrant, and for decades his boots served as Rogers's footwear of choice for trips to the local market.

Lieutenant Colonel Richard Dawnay and others in the British military's Force Anguilla were responsible for numerous controversial actions, and two soldiers were prosecuted for rape.[78] Armed soldiers took many residents into custody, including the small number of North Americans living on the island who were grilled about an underground defense force. Soldiers dug trenches into the dry ground and set up frequent roadblocks. They violently searched homes and seized the cars of locals as they secured remote areas.[79] As soldiers walked through villages for the first time, they pushed adults and children alike up against walls and searched them, without offering any explanation for their actions, at times doing so at gunpoint.

Ionia Hodge, a woman from the small village of Sandy Hill, recalls that the paratroopers "trenched themselves along the road early in the morning and as people passed by they would stop them and search them for weapons and what not, but they did not find anything." She was in her yard when one of them told her that they had "come to kill and destroy because they heard there was bloodshed in Anguilla."[80] Another woman who chanted "Britain, Go Home" that day described the invasion as "much more repugnant than any slap in the face." She continued, "more was spent *on military actions* that morning than had been spent on Anguilla in our 300 years of British colonialism." They "ignored our cries for help and then accused us of violence!"[81]

Valentine "Barbie" Ruan, a mechanic who had served as Webster's bodyguard, encouraged his friends to "walk straight" and to avoid misunderstandings in the days following the invasion.[82] Even those who protested sought to do just that, as suggested by the more than 30 guns that were handed over voluntarily. Searches for weapons uncovered a few grenades and guns but nothing of the sort suggested in public accusations that violent hooligans and Mafia agents were running an island "gripped by terror."[83] Nevertheless, British bobbies and a platoon of Royal Marines were soon added to the force. Neither they nor anyone else ever uncovered any indication that the terrorists or organized crime mentioned by Bradshaw and Whitlock actually existed.

Aftermath of "The Landing"

Bradshaw quickly sent a number of his armed policemen to Anguilla in response to a British invitation to do so, ordering them to shoot anyone who fired at them. The belatedly satisfied Kittian leader applauded the invasion, stating, "Britain is responsible for our external affairs and defense, so she did no more than to discharge these responsibilities when she sent troops to Anguilla." He indicated that the move was long overdue and compared the event to US actions in South Vietnam.[84]

Interpretations of events following the invasion were communicated to the civilian population from Radio Anguilla. The island's first radio station, it was created by the occupying force and initially broadcast from one of the warships in Crocus Bay. After operations moved inland, its first program featured Linda Banks, former associated-statehood beauty-queen contestant, reading from *Reader's Digest*. The station served as the forum in which debates about national symbols and identity would unfold, including the question of whether citizens were Anguillan or Anguillian. It also brought them local updates about the numerous development projects undertaken by soldiers turned engineers.

In the months ahead, British military officials began to refer to Operation Sheepskin as "the landing" rather than the invasion, and frequently "the Revolution" was "the crisis" or the "period of violence and lawlessness." These semantic shifts allowed Britain to recover a minimal amount of credibility after political commentators and journalists all over the world ridiculed its decision to invade. They also facilitated the creation of a narrative that discouraged the formulation of questions about why they had invaded and why they chose to stay. Anguilla's people

maintained their strong convictions that the future would have to be different from the past. Most eventually proved willing to turn the other cheek, but they demanded guarantees of a future of freedom from St. Kitts.

Ronald Webster, today often referred to as “the father of the nation,” remained hugely significant in the immediate aftermath of the invasion and for decades thereafter. Webster saw eye-to-eye with the British on numerous issues, and when he did challenge them he usually did so with substantial public backing. He continued to refer to Anguilla as a nation and to proclaim his willingness to die for the cause; this troubled military officials, who sought to avoid creating a political martyr. They worked to carefully manipulate his image and at the same time earn the trust of the public.

British soldiers embarked on numerous development projects, in part to reduce public opposition to the occupation. Priority initiatives included a paved runway that permitted the landing of Andover jets and roads that facilitated the completion of military patrols across the island. Later came a prefabricated school, medical facilities, a prison, and the training of a new local police force. The Royal Engineers played a role as a police reserve, one maintained in case the authorities deemed it necessary to use force in response to opposition to their policies or decisions.

Also active in the area of psychological operations, soldiers dedicated substantial attention to hearts-and-minds patrols that were meant to prevent unrest. Troops stressed the idea that military involvement in the island’s affairs was benevolent and that local cooperation would result in a solution to Anguilla’s problems. Their duties included the organization of outdoor screenings of the 1960 English-language version of *Hercules* and films on health, hygiene, personal safety, and personal finances. In the films, health was linked to the purchase of large appliances and personal financial planning to mortgages, loans, and the potential dividing up of family lands. These practices were relatively alien to the local landscape, and most Anguillians rejected their equation with progress.

Over the three years in which soldiers remained, several earned the reputation of “friend,” at times for assisting in moments of crisis. They were assigned to play cricket and football with local children and to walk through villages where they would help people in times of need. Soldiers also organized a week-long Jamboree for Girl Guides and Boy Scouts. Eventually some paid local women to do their laundry and prepare them

meals. Scholarships, job programs, and ongoing development aid aimed to complement these efforts at the same time that they improved civilians' quality of life. As the local landscape was gradually transformed, visible resistance to the presence of troops waned.

Today Anguillians tend to see the 1980 confirmation of the island's status as a British Dependent Territory and subsequent economic prosperity as accomplishments of the Revolution that should be appreciated and on occasion celebrated. For many of them, these outcomes mark a transition from colonial domination to de facto independence and the emergence of a new Anguilla. The controversy, violence, and infractions on freedom that characterized Operation Sheepskin have for the most part faded from popular memory.

But the past looms large in the peripheries of empire. As the 50th anniversary of the Anguilla Revolution approaches, its surviving rebels and supporters encourage members of the younger generations to contemplate the origins of freedom, development, and prosperity. As Verna Bryan, a woman who participated in numerous marches and demonstrations as a young girl, explains, "We are not ashamed from whence we came and have to create a society that honors the revolutionary part of our past."[85] Today, she and others cherish the nationalist discourse that was strengthened by acts of resistance against the creation of the Associated State of St. Kitts, Nevis, and Anguilla in the 1960s. They lament the historical amnesia that accompanies both high rates of violent crime and political rivalry and stagnation. Seeking to renew social consciousness, for years Iwandai Gumbs turned to memories of his participation in rebel actions at the airport as he "talks the news" on his daily program on Up Beat Radio. In his words, "Today we can't get anything done in the name of 'we'. We've lost our unity and sense of purpose." He appreciated many of the results of the Revolution, especially the opportunities that allowed his daughter to pursue her higher education on the island, but he rejected the status quo and insists that "her heritage requires that she know that revolution is unfinished."[86]

Notes

1. Petty and Hodge, *Anguilla's Battle*, 8–9.
2. For a narrative relating the Revolution to the emergence of Anguillian character and nationalism, see Bernice B. Lake, "What Makes Us Anguillians" (paper presented at the Third Biennial National Development Conference, The Valley, Anguilla, November 12, 2007).

3. Mawby, *Ordering Independence*, 216.
4. Petty and Hodge, *Anguilla's Battle*, 5.
5. Updike, "Letter from Anguilla," 65.
6. Passalacqua, "St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla," 6.
7. Hubbard, *History of St. Kitts*, 143.
8. House of Commons Parliamentary Debates, *Weekly Hansard,* no. 711, January 27–February 2, 1967.
9. House of Commons Parliamentary Debates, *Weekly Hansard,* no. 711, January 27–February 2, 1967.
10. People in Nevis also rejected the structure of the associated state; they complained that they were allocated only two of the ten seats in its assembly and held that the Kittian majority consistently favored its own constituents. Hubbard, *History of St. Kitts*, 143.
11. In 2014, several interviewees asserted that the only modern Caribbean revolutions to have achieved their goals in the end were those of Anguilla and Cuba.
12. Webster, *Revolutionary Leader*, 12.
13. In 2014 interviews, several people attributed this action to retaliation for the lack of political support for Bradshaw among Anguillians.
14. Atlin Harrigan, "Editorial," *Beacon* (Anguilla), September 27, 1967.
15. John "Bob" Rogers, interview by the author and Jansie Webster, September 20, 2014, transcript.
16. John "Bob" Rogers interview.
17. John "Bob" Rogers interview.
18. Walicek, "Freedom for the Emancipated," 156–158.
19. Petty and Hodge, *Anguilla's Battle*, 48.
20. "Anguilla," *Times* (London), August 2, 1967.
21. "Anguilla," *Times.*
22. John "Bob" Rogers interview.
23. Webster, *Scrapbook*, 84.
24. For those who supported the movement against formal association with St. Kitts, law and order on their island prevailed and did not need to be restored. Some people did break existing laws in order to strengthen support for the cause and force Britain to become involved.
25. John "Bob" Rogers interview.
26. Mawby, "Overwhelmed," 258.
27. Clevette Rogers, interview by the author and Jansie Webster, February 19, 2014, transcript.
28. Sid Moody, "Little Island of Anguilla Still Seeking Dependency," April 28, 1968, Anguilla Heritage Room, Anguilla Library Service.
29. Webster, *Scrapbook*, 30.
30. "Anguilla Had Mail Troubles Too," *Journal* (Newcastle upon Tyne), April 10, 1969.

31. "Commonwealth Secretariat Background Paper, St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla: Recent Developments," 3, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO papers on Anguilla) 141/57.
32. Bradshaw was angered when the leaders of the rebel movement appealed for recognition as a separate associated state but was further enraged when they, after not receiving a response from Britain, announced that they would accept annexation by the US. Passalacqua, "St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla," 6.
33. As explained by Ronald J. Webster, Anguilla's rejection of association with St. Kitts involved two declarations of independence. The first, in 1967, involved a refusal to cooperate and dialogue with the central government in Basseterre. Adams was involved in the early part of the movement but was not formally elected and only occasionally identified himself as the President of Anguilla. The second, in 1969, was a bolder and more organized unilateral declaration of independence that took place without any agreement with Britain. Ronald J. Webster, interview by the author, February 17, 2014, transcript.
34. Ronald J. Webster, interview.
35. Iwandai Gumbs, interview by the author and Jansie Webster, February 23, 2014, transcript.
36. Ronald J. Webster, interview.
37. Ronald J. Webster, interview.
38. Ronald J. Webster, interview.
39. "Mr. Jerry Gumbs," *Beacon* (Anguilla), October 28, 1967.
40. "Mr. Jerry Gumbs," *Beacon*.
41. Fisher and Kohr served as advisors in the areas of law and development, respectively. See Juan de Onis, *New York Times*, "Anguillian Representative Calls on UN to Recognize Island's Independence," August 6, 1967.
42. "Commonwealth Secretariat Background Paper," 3.
43. Tammy Gumbs, email message to the author, September 28, 2014.
44. Like most men on the island, Gumbs spent years abroad simply to secure wages to survive. He acquired the gifts of healing and prophecy in eastern Cuba in the 1920s, when a voice told him that he had been chosen by God. See Walicek, "George Anderson Gumbs."
45. Webster, *Revolutionary Leader*, 26.
46. Ronald J. Webster, interview; Carmen Woods, interview by the author and Jansie Webster, February 17, 2014, transcript.
47. Canon Carleton's appointment as parish priest was eventually revoked because of his involvement in the Revolution; his writings and securing of arms proved particularly controversial. See Brooks, "Role of the Church."
48. Norman Kirkham, "Bradshaw Asks Stewart for Guns and Tear Gas," *Daily Telegraph* (London), May 10, 1969.
49. Richie Allen, "Anguilla Will Remain Part of Tri-Island State Says Bradshaw," *Journal* (Newcastle upon Tyne), April 15, 1969.

50. "Editorial," *Beacon* (Anguilla), November 2, 1968.
51. Leopold Kohr, "The Ten Facts of Anguilla Life," *San Juan Star* (San Juan, PR), March 26, 1969.
52. British diplomatic papers indicate that the US was concerned about the division of associated states and the emergence of numerous small independent republics. While the US maintained distance from the crisis, its diplomats expressed concern about Webster's influence as a charismatic leader. For "the balance sheet," see "Editorial," *Beacon* (Anguilla), November 2, 1968.
53. "Commonwealth Secretariat Background Paper," 3–4.
54. See Announcement by Campbell Fleming, *Beacon* (Anguilla), September 28, 1968.
55. "Commonwealth Secretariat Background Paper," 4–5.
56. "Commonwealth Secretariat Background Paper," 4–5.
57. "Commonwealth Secretariat Background Paper," 5. Shortly after the announcement of these results, President-elect Webster appealed to both the US and Mexico for recognition, but neither answered. See Eloy O. Aguilar, "Webster Tells Why Anguilla Is Independent," *Daily News of the Virgin Islands* (Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas), February 20, 1969; and "Tiny Anguilla Votes to Cut British Ties and Be a Republic," *New York Times*, February 8, 1969.
58. Republic of Anguilla, "Statement of Policy," March 1969, Anguilla Heritage Room, Anguilla Library Services.
59. Westlake, *Under an English Heaven*, 178–181.
60. Westlake, *Under an English Heaven*, 178–181.
61. Brisk, *Dilemma of a Ministate*, 27.
62. Westlake, *Under an English Heaven*, 205.
63. "Mistakes in Foreign Policy," *Times* (London), March 11, 1969.
64. Ronald J. Webster, interview.
65. Webster, *Revolutionary Leader*, 111.
66. Carmen Woods, interview.
67. Ministry of Defence, Royal Navy, Department of Public Relations, "Operation Sheepskin—The Invasion of Anguilla," *Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire*, http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/2021; Webster, *Scrapbook*, 108–109.
68. Webster, *Scrapbook*, 107.
69. He later wrote that his people had already collected ammunition and guns and hidden them in "secret vaults." Webster, *Scrapbook*, 110. Today several locals involved in the movement recall that arms were wrapped in plastic and hidden in abandoned wells and an underground cave.
70. Webster, *Scrapbook*, 107.
71. Webster, *Scrapbook*, 114–115.
72. Ministry of Defence, "Operation Sheepskin—The Invasion of Anguilla."

73. Examples of slogans and signs held by protesters can be seen in the unedited silent film "Operation Sheepskin—The Invasion of Anguilla."
74. Olive Rogers, interview by the author and Jansie Webster, February 19, 2014, transcript.
75. Olive Rogers, interview.
76. "Anguillans Tell British to Get Out," *Washington Post*, March 20, 1969.
77. Olive Rogers, interview.
78. Force Anguilla consisted of part of the 2nd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment, a half-squadron of Royal Engineers, members of the Royal Army Medical Corps and the Royal Corps of Signals, and a Metropolitan Police detachment.
79. Westlake, *Under an English Heaven*, 207.
80. Ionia Hodge, interview by the author and Jansie Webster, October 24, 2014, transcript.
81. Lana Conor Hoyoung, interview by the author and Jansie Webster, October 24, 2014, transcript.
82. Bobby Valentine, interview by the author and Jansie Webster, February 15, 2014, transcript.
83. Brisk, *Dilemma of a Ministate*, 27.
84. Richie Allen, "Anguilla Will Remain Part of Tri-Island State Says Bradshaw," *Journal* (Newcastle upon Tyne), April 15, 1969.
85. Verna Bryan, interview by the author and Jansie Webster, February 19, 2014, transcript.
86. Iwandai Gumbs, interview.

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Don E. Walicek is Associate Professor of English in the College of Humanities at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus. He has served as editor of the Caribbean-studies journal *Sargasso* since 2009. His previous publications include chapters and articles on language and social life in Anguilla, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. He and Jessica Adams are currently co-editing a volume titled *Guantánamo and American Empire, the Humanities Respond*.

Editors
Shalini Puri
Department of English
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Lara Putnam
Department of History
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

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